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Illinois DCFS Offers Post-Secondary Scholarships to Current and Former Youth in Care

DCFS Scholarship Program applications accepted until March 31

CHICAGO – The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is currently accepting applications for the 2024 DCFS Scholarship Program. Through the program, a minimum of 53 academic scholarships will be awarded to current and former youth in care for the upcoming school year, with four awards reserved for the children of veterans and two reserved for students pursuing degrees in social work in honor of Pamela Knight and Deidre Silas, two DCFS caseworkers who succumbed to injuries sustained in the line of duty.

Scholarship recipients receive up to five consecutive years of tuition and academic fee waivers to be used at participating Illinois state community colleges and public universities, a monthly grant of \$1,577 to offset other expenses and a medical card. Last year DCFS awarded scholarships to 259 college-bound youth, the most in the agency's history.

“As Governor, I’ve made it my priority to ensure that every Illinois student has access to higher education—and that includes youth in DCFS care,” says **Governor JB Pritzker**. “After awarding a record-breaking 259 DCFS scholarships last year, I couldn’t be more excited to share that we are once again opening applications for 2024. This is about more than just education—it’s about equity and a lifetime of opportunity, and I encourage all current and former youth in care to apply.”

“It’s our mission to provide every youth in our care with the resources and support they need to succeed through every stage of life, and our commitment does not end when they graduate from high school,” said **Illinois DCFS Director Marc D. Smith**. “These scholarships will open the door to a lifetime of possibilities for our youth as they prepare for adulthood and plan for their futures.”

The DCFS Scholarship Program is available to youth who have an open DCFS case, whose cases were closed through adoption or guardianship or who aged out of care at 18 or older. Youth who are at least 16 years old on March 31 may apply.



“Receiving the DCFS Scholarship has allowed me to support my family while pursuing higher education. Having this on my resume has piqued the interest of my network, from potential employment to volunteerism opportunities, and has given me new outlets for learning, growth and support,” said Priscilla, a 2023 scholarship recipient. “Being a scholarship recipient has also created spaces for success and connection with other current and former youth in care, where higher education has not created these spaces for us yet. I encourage other youth to apply for the scholarship to expand their potential and be supported while doing so.”

Scholarship recipients are selected based on their scholastic record and aptitude, community and extracurricular activities, three letters of recommendation from non-relatives and a personal essay illustrating their purpose for higher education. Scholarships are awarded to students interested in pursuing education at Illinois trade schools, community colleges or traditional colleges or universities.

Applications are available online at <https://apply.mykaleidoscope.com/scholarships/DCFS2024>. Students are encouraged to submit their applications in advance of the March 31 deadline.

Students or caregivers may call the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services at 217-557-2689 or email DCFS.Scholarship@illinois.gov with questions about the application process or for more information.

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***About the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)** Founded in 1964, DCFS is responsible for protecting children from abuse or neglect by responding to reports received by the Child Abuse Hotline at childabuse.illinois.gov (non-emergency situations) or 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873). With the goal of keeping children safe, DCFS strengthens and supports families with a wide range of services. When keeping a child safe means removing them from the home, DCFS makes every effort to reunite them with their family. When the best interest of the child makes this impossible, DCFS is committed to pursuing guardianship or adoption by loving families to provide children with a safe and permanent home. DCFS is also responsible for licensing and monitoring of all Illinois child welfare agencies.*